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U.S. Called Clean on Diem

By Norman Kempster
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Senate CIA investigators have concluded there was no direct American involvement in the murder of former South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem after his overthrow, Sen. John Tower, R-Tex., said yesterday.

"There was no direct American involvement in the assassination," Tower said. "American involvement was specifially rejected at high levels."

Tower spoke to reporters after the Senate select intelligence committee questioned CIA Director William B. Colby for more than two hours about the 1963 killing of Diem.

The lawmakers also questioned Lucien Conein, a Saigon operative of the CIA at the time of the Diem overthrow. Conein is now an official of the Drug Enforcement Administration.

TOWER SAID CONEIN and Colby "covered essentially the same ground" although Conein provided greater detail on actual events in Saigon.

Tower discussed only the broad outline of the testimony which the committee heard behind closed doors. Tower talked to reporters because Chairman Frank Church, D-Idaho, who usually handles the briefing chore, was out of the city.

The Pentagon Papers made it clear that the U.S. government backed the coup, but Tower said that although American officials were aware of the coup, they took no part in it.

"The United States held aloof on it...but regardless of whether the United States had taken an active part in it or not, the coup would have taken place," Tower said.

CHURCH HAS SAID the committee is trying to learn the chain of command that approved CIA assassination plots. The committee yesterday announced a witness list for next week that is heavily loaded with former officials of the Kennedy administration.

Kennedy's national security adviser, McGeorge Bundy, and deputy defense secretary, Roswell Gilpatric, were called for Monday. On Wednesday, the committee will question William Harvey, former chief of CIA clandestine operations, and Walt Rostow, Bundy's deputy and later successor as national security adviser.

Scheduled for Thursday are former Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Gen. Maxwell Taylor, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Former Defense Secretary Robert McNamara was scheduled to appear Friday.